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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

Mid-March was Mertzon's turn to host the quarterly district meeting of the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers' Assn. One of my compadres was supposed to chair the meeting, but he came down with a bad case of sage fever that turned into what's known by the actor's guild as "open curtain fever."

I was delighted to take over the job. Microphones have a strong attraction for me. Every time I mount a stage, I want to take the microphone in my arms and embrace it. Nevertheless, as talkers make a big increase, audiences are becoming thinner and thinner. So many folks are going to toastmaster's clubs and jumping up at meetings and making impromptu reports that by the end of the decade there may not be a half-dozen listeners left on this side of the Mississippi River.

Sheep and goat herders are easy to address. All the chairperson has to do to introduce the speakers is brush up on such grim topics as "Now our honored president will give the final requiem for the wool and mohair market," or "Next, out astute executive secretary will explain how to convince the referee in bankruptcy court actions that old feed troughs and second-hand saddles should be part of the homestead exemption act."

However, before the meeting was conceded, my voice was taking on a tremor that would've made the vibration of the main shaft on a paddle wheel riverboat seem like the captain has shifted to low gear. The insurance chairman reported that he thought that soon Border Collie sheep dogs were going to come under minimum wage laws and the workman comp standards. One guy jumped up and said he'd heard that the stockpile of unsold wool in Australia equaled 21 years worth of our production. Another added that any time they wanted to, New Zealand could cover the entire land surface of the state of California six feet deep in frozen legs of lamb.

I had to ask four times for a motion to adjourn. The ol' boy sitting on the front row was so preoccupied with coloring a styrofoam coffee cup with his ball point pen that he still hadn't moved from his chair 10 minutes after the meeting closed.